

Letter from Fred H. Wines to Alexander Graham Bell, November 21, 1899

7—001. TWELFTH CENSUS OF THE United States DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, M CENSUS OFFICE, Washington, D. C., November 21, 1899. Dr. Alexander Graham Bell, 1331 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D. C. Dear Sir:

I am sorry that it will not be possible for me to meet with your Committee at the Gilsey House in New York next Thursday morning, but I really do not regard my presence as of any importance.

With reference to Wm. Wade, of Oakmont, Pa., I received a letter from him dated November 14, in which he says that he is much interested in the deaf-blind as a class, and realizing the lack of special interest in them, and realizing the astonishing ignorance of even professional educators as to the comparative ease with which they may be taught, he, prepared a list of both educated and uneducated, which he says is very incomplete and which, it seems to him, will always remain so. He informs me that the census reports of 1890 are said to have given over 250 cases, which he regards as excessive. I have thus far been unable to find any reference to the deaf-blind in the census reports of that year. It certainly is not in the tabulation, nor in the index.

Mr. Wade applies the term "deaf-blind" to only those normal in general intelligence who have neither sense sufficiently developed to be of any practical use. It appears to me that this is too restrictive a definition. It excludes from the enumeration of the deaf-blind many persons who are, in fact, both deaf and blind; for instance, it excludes all who are also feeble-minded, of whom there is a large number. Mr. Wade says that there are many cases of double infirmity in which no information can be obtained from the families of the children reported, and he promises to make a list and forward it to me for the guidance of

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the enumerators. It occurs to me that possibly the Volta Bureau may like to investigate this phase of the subject.

Mr. Wade writes—"The recent stuff in the papers about Helen Keller's examinations for Radcliffe is the most preposterous nonsense extant. How anyone knowing her could publish such evident rot as that she passed examinations when the questions were given her in a print she did not understand, passes my comprehension. Even her wonderful mentality cannot accomplish impossibilities, and her exquisite beauty of character is deformed by such stuff about her being published."

I replied to Mr Wade's letter, and received another from him, dated November 17, in which he says that he got his statement with regard to the census of 1890 from one of the papers published by the schools for the deaf, and he is nearly certain that it was the "Silent Hoosier", of Indianapolis. He distinctly remembers that some statement was afterwards made in several similar papers. He says the nonsensical stuff about Helen Keller provokes him all the more because it was published in the Boston Transcript, and was apparently written by Mr. Chamberlin, one of the editors, in whose house Helen had been a 3 guest for nearly a year. He is sure that it was this fact that led such very careful papers as the Annals and the Association Review to publish it.

I have forgotten to look up the name of the book on Helen Keller which I mentioned to you, but you will get it in time.

Very sincerely yours, Fred H. Acting Director.